

# ESSAI

---

Volume 5

Article 14

---

1-1-2007

## Silence Misunderstood

Joseph A. Deardurff

*College of DuPage*, [essai\\_deardurff@cod.edu](mailto:essai_deardurff@cod.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <http://dc.cod.edu/essai>

---

### Recommended Citation

Deardurff, Joseph A. (2007) "Silence Misunderstood," *ESSAI*: Vol. 5, Article 14.

Available at: <http://dc.cod.edu/essai/vol5/iss1/14>

This Selection is brought to you for free and open access by the College Publications at DigitalCommons@C.O.D.. It has been accepted for inclusion in ESSAI by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@C.O.D.. For more information, please contact [koteles@cod.edu](mailto:koteles@cod.edu).

## Silence Misunderstood

by Joseph A. Deardurff

(English 1101)

**S**ilence is a pervasive and unavoidable language. While spoken languages unite one group, at the same time these languages separate them from all others. Silence is a universal language that transcends borders. There is the silence of simply no sound and the silence of an individual who is not speaking, which often suggests emotions or reactions too profound for words. Silence can suggest everything and nothing. Silence is misunderstood.

Smiles and tears are also a universal language, but the meanings behind them are understandable and limited. Silence can mean anything. Defined as “the state of keeping or being silent; forbearance from speech or comment,” the textual assertion of silence is truncated and already misunderstood. Both powerful and powerless, silence harbors anger and fear, happiness and despair, greed and pride, self-pity and prejudice, and all other emotions that have not yet been born into words. Silence masks them all. Do the quiet surrender their opportunity to connect with those around them, or do they choose not to speak, and rather, take an exit off the expressway of verbal congestion to venture into the neighborhoods of their mind? Perhaps silence means defiance or detachment, or intimidation and submission to those who dominate and pollute the air space by cranking words into the void. The spoken word is just one mode of mental transportation. To the silent it means depth and discernment. Silence does not punctuate the world of voices; it is our voices that garnish a world of silence. It is the constant in life until someone adds to or subtracts from it.

When the voice stops speaking the mind goes home and enters the retreat house of silence. It is that place that cannot be pictured or framed, measured, confined, or defined. Its owner did not create it, nor can it be destroyed or abandoned. It is a perpetual refuge of constant us. It is an invisible castle of infinite size where character is raised, where dreams are born and die, where good and bad fight to succeed, the nucleus of your life into which an expressway ushers thoughts. Silence is the battleground where you fight yourself. Silence is a private mess hall, an impermeable fortress with a risky way out – the voice. Many people do not recognize the influence of their silence on their lives. It hears every word you didn’t say.

Who can judge the silence of another? The Silent interact with the world in a mysterious way. We garnish our thoughts and weed the gardens of our mind before evoking the spoken word. Silence resounds the sounds of our hearts that only we as individuals can hear. Silent people are often defined by the assumptions made by others in their own silence. To the ears of others we are indifferent and disengaged members of society consumed by thought, intimidation, disinterest, or perhaps nothing at all. Words of men are praised, admired, and remembered. Their words condemned, thwarted, and rejected. The silent man defines himself and he can be everything and anything. He could be nothing.

As a boy, I had an inclination to let my mind open rather than my mouth. However, my second grade teacher thought it best to see that my land never be left unworked and that I pedaled the way of my classmates. I, like everyone else, was expected to share my ideas or comments with the class by raising my hand and speaking when called upon. However, I much preferred the safety of sitting soundlessly in class. My imagination was free to billow over and swirl around the classroom, all so invisible and safe from the harsh judgmental ears of my classmates.

During the designated quiet time reserved only for in-class homework, my second grade teacher called me to her desk. Her voice slashed open the silence of the classroom and sent my

soaring mind cowering back into my head. I moved towards her enormous desk as though I were a lawbreaker going before a judge for a crime of which I was still unaware. She wore a concerned face as though she was unsure of what to say when I arrived. With a finger to her lips, she reminded the class it was still quiet time.

Several minutes later I was moving back to my desk screaming silently down a highway of thought. I was told that an idle mind was the devil's workshop. I sat down at my tiny desk still unconvinced my quietness was a bad quality. My castle was under attack. I was being watched, not by eyes, but by ears. I had been misunderstood. The screaming silence inside my head repeated again and again, "*Why are you so quiet in class? Tell me what you think about when you're quiet.*" My teacher had softly asked those questions with such sincerity, expecting an answer with which she could connect and be pleased. I tried to answer her, but all that came out was more quietness. I could not answer her, not because I did not want to, but because her obstinance was like a blinding searchlight that sent away all the thoughts in my head and left me empty and defenseless and silent evermore.

Maybe had I given her an answer she would not have told me that it was not good to be so quiet and that I should stop *daydreaming*. My silence in her classroom had become mindless daydreaming and somehow I was letting my fertile land go rotten. I was alienating myself from pure ideas because my silence had become a piece of open land, providing a place of unrestricted growth for polluted thoughts. Surely she must have thought the safest mind was one constantly flowing with words, allowing no time for a stagnancy that could give birth to impurity. Through it all, I had been misunderstood.

Today, I could not tell you what I was thinking about in my second grade classroom, nor could I then. I was quiet because I wanted to be. My mind still had places to go that my words could not take it.

The secret of silence will always point the direction of the heart. While words often lie and frequently disappoint the intentions of the heart, the world is often misinterpreting the sounds of silence. They will never speak the same language. Just as the man who never leaves the confines of his mind will never appreciate his silence, the man who never finds retreat in silence will never appreciate his words.